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ABSTRACT

This study examines an intervention in a Canadian school district that employed teacher and principal reassignment as a stimulus to professional growth. The researchers interviewed the transferred teachers and principals as well as a sample of nontransferred teachers, parents, and district trustees to explore the effect of transfer on the development of transferred teachers, as well as on the teachers' colleagues, schools, and district. Among the positive effects found by the study were increased teacher enthusiasm and use of new techniques, enlarged teacher perspectives on student development and district needs, self-examination and change in the receiving schools, and increased dialogue and sharing of ideas among teaching staffs. Negative effects of the intervention included teacher distrust, burdensome preparation time, practical problems of time and money connected with travel to new schools, and mutual adjustment difficulties between teachers and community members. The study draws on the case to discuss conditions under which transfer can offer a viable solution to teacher stagnation and to recommend essential elements for a transfer policy. (Author)

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INVOLUNTARY TEACHER TRANSFER:

An Intervention Strategy for Professional Development

Final Report

September, 1985

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Involuntary Teacher Transfer:

An Intervention Strategy for Professional Development

ABSTRACT

This study examines an intervention in a Canadian school district that employed teacher and principal reassignment as a stimulus to professional growth. The researchers interviewed the transferred teachers and principals as well as a sample of non-transferred teachers, parents, and district trustees to explore the effect of transfer on the development of transferred teachers, as well as on the teachers' colleagues, schools, and district. Among the positive effects found by the study were increased teacher enthusiasm and use of new techniques, enlarged teacher perspectives on student development and district needs, self-examination and change in the receiving schools, and increased dialogue and sharing of ideas among teaching staffs. Negative effects of the intervention included teacher distrust, burdensome preparation time, practical problems of time and money connected with travel to new schools, and mutual adjustment difficulties between teachers and community members. The study draws on the case to discuss conditions under which transfer can offer a viable solution to teacher stagnation and to recommend essential elements for a transfer policy.

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher transfer has long been a Janus-like phenomenon in education. One face is threatening -- transfer is a cold, impersonal mechanism for resolving problems like enrollment decline, poor performance, budget cuts, and staffing problems, often with little regard for the needs of the teachers involved in such transfers. The other face of teacher transfer is attractive -- it is one of the few potential sources for renewal or the pursuit of better working environments available to teachers. Administrators and teachers alike often refer to transfer as a panacea for stagnation. Yet they also realize that transfers can be painful, and at times, disastrous.

In the fall of 1984, the O.I.S.E. Northwestern Field Office was requested to undertake a retrospective study of the effects of a series of teacher and principal transfers previously conducted within the 1983-84 school year in the Newcastle-Kent Board of Education. Specifically, the study was to examine whether these transfers resulted in the anticipated professional development growth for teachers. In this preliminary report, the following areas will be addressed: perceptions of the rationale for transfers; the effects of the transfers; the relationship of the transfers to professional growth and school climate; and the

general influence of the transfers on the Board. The last section will address some suggestions regarding future transfers and a transfer policy.

I. LITERATURE REVIEW

Historically, involuntary teacher transfer has been associated with disciplinary action: teachers who were not performing adequately were often transferred to another school or situation in the hopes that improvement might occur. Voluntary transfer has often been associated with upward mobility: after having served in a less "desirable" situation, teachers "earned" over time the privilege of moving into classrooms populated by students perceived to be bright or cooperative. During the period of enrollment decline, however, opportunities for transfer declined considerably. Very few new teachers entered and experienced teachers did not usually have the option of changing within or between schools. A natural impetus to change and teacher renewal was thus impaired. Mann (1978) observed:

> As long as teaching mobility remained high, a principal could count on replacing perhaps as much as one-fifth of his staff in a year. But now and for the foreseeable future... school reform must be accomplished through existing personnel (p. 212).

The principal of one of the high schools portrayed in Lightfoot's The Good High School describes static conditions

within his teaching staff as "the single most difficult dilemma that will be faced by his system in the 1980's" (p. 335).

The literature on teacher transfer is quite thin, especially on the subject of the effect of transfer on teacher development. Teacher mobility studies, which account for most of the literature, are concerned with charting teacher-initiated moves over the course of teaching careers. Many focus on the movement of experienced teachers from inner city to suburban school settings. The intent of these studies, however, is to chart movement rather than to explore the influence that transfer has had on teachers' professional development.

There are few empirical studies of the effects of transfer on teaching careers. A notable exception is a field study by Reed and Paznokas (1983) of teacher transfer and job satisfaction, which found that teacher willingness to transfer was a key factor in subsequent job satisfaction. The study also found that transfers were most successful when teachers were assigned positions for which they had some previous experience. Although most of the teachers in the study experienced a drop in satisfaction at the time of the transfer, that level rose again with time, as familiarity with the new situation increased.

The level of satisfaction remained low only in the cases of teachers who were unwilling to transfer.

Accounts by educators with experiences in teacher transfer support Reed and Paznokas. A key theme in reports by Hollingsworth (1981), Ricken (1983), and Weller (1984) is the emotional aspect of many transfer situations. They suggest that appropriate preparation and adjustment time is a key facilitating condition in involuntary transfer situations. All three conclude that with proper support, transfers can be an effective source of teacher renewal.

Theoretical grounds for the potential of teacher transfer as a source of professional growth can be found in the literature on teacher development. Sykes (1983) speaks to the necessity for teachers to increase the breadth of their experience and to relieve the "unvarying prospects (that) often lead to a predictable response: routinization of instruction and the progressive disengagement from work and career" (p. 110). Sprinthall and Thies-Sprinthall (1983) stress the value that change of role offers, at the same time noting that "significant professional development is often painful" (p. 28). Other key writers on teacher development such as Harris (1980) and Howey

(1981) emphasize that teachers need regular opportunities to experience novel situations, gain perspective, and rethink present assumptions.

Despite the positive possibilities of transfer noted by some educators and developmentalists, however, most of the literature on transfer offers coping advice to teachers and tips to administrators, indicating that transfers are not routinely well-planned and that transferred teachers do not often receive the support they need. This inference is supported by the findings of a 1980 survey (Collins & Masley) in which teachers rated involuntary transfer higher than any other factor as a cause of stress. Burden (1983), Chism (1984), and Davison (1971) document the preference of most teachers to remain in a given situation except in cases of extreme duress or circumstantial changes, such as family relocations or maternity leaves. In the Chism study, which explored transfer as one option for growth available to teachers, the teachers cite two main reasons for avoiding transfer: fear of the unknown and lack of teacher participation in transfer decisions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study was undertaken to explore further the issue of the effect of transfer on teaching, specifically:

-- how does transfer affect the development of teachers?

-- does transfer offer a viable alternative to the problem of teacher immobility?

-- what effects does the transfer of a teacher have on that teacher's colleagues and on the school environment in general?

-- under what circumstances is transfer likely to be effective?

-- what would an effective transfer policy encompass?

II. METHODOLOGY

The questions were explored through a case study of a junior/senior kindergarten - 8 school district in the Canadian province of Ontario that was the site of a planned transfer intervention. The intervention began with the reassignment of the principals in three of the schools serving the three communities that comprise the district. In addition, ten teachers were transferred to new schools and grade levels, some voluntarily and others involuntarily.

In gathering the information to answer the questions posed, every effort was made to represent as many perspectives as possible. Each transferred teacher and principal was interviewed. In two schools, non-transferred teachers were questioned as to the effects of the transfers on their schools. In addition, all trustees were interviewed. Lastly, a purposive sample of parents was included in the study. This sample was derived from a list provided by the elementary principals. Each principal was requested to suggest two parents who were supportive of the school and two parents who were not as supportive. A sample of three supportive and three not-as-supportive parents, representing all three communities, was selected and interviewed.

All but one interview was taped. In the one exception, the individual involved felt uncomfortable being taped and requested that a tape recorder not be used. The taped interviews were transcribed onto computer diskette.

The interview transcripts were used to develop the categories and then used to analyze the data. A coding scheme was developed and administered by two researchers working independently. The coding was then compared and reconciled. Coding notations were transferred to computer diskette. Data was

re-organized into categories and sub-categories. The resulting data displays provided the empirical basis of this report.

III. FINDINGS

The findings of this study have yielded some interesting and useful data regarding the effects of transfers on teachers' professional growth. It must, however, be noted that the findings must be viewed as a continuum. As mentioned in the literature review, the desire for transfer seems to be directly related to the effects of the transfer. In this study, two individuals appeared particularly hostile to the concept of a transfer while the other transferees appeared to fall somewhere between being somewhat less hostile and an active desire to be transferred. On a general level, with the exception of the two individuals alluded to above, the transfers appeared to foster teacher development. In the following sections, the extent of this growth will be addressed.

A. PERCEPTIONS OF REASONS FOR TRANSFERS

The data suggests that the reasons ascribed for the transfers differ for the various groups interviewed. Although social meaning is constructed by individuals, this difference is important to the study as it might directly effect the self-

esteem of the transferred teachers and consequently the success of the transfers. The transferred teachers generally articulated such factors as promoting teacher growth, revitalizing the system, or spreading expertise as the reasons the Board chose this path. However, the other groups interviewed (including trustees, parents, administrators, and non-transferred teachers), while citing the above reasons, also emphasized the reprimand aspects of transfers. The following two sections explore these divergent perceptions.

The two overwhelming reasons given for the transfers by the involved teachers included the low mobility of the teaching staff within the district and the resulting stagnation and need for growth. As one teacher explained, "Towns like Kent and Greenville, they don't have another school where you can transfer within the community." Therefore, in a time of declining enrollment the teaching staff has lost the mobility prevalent a decade ago. As suggested by a trustee, "...in the last few years we have had nobody leave the system." This has resulted in an older teaching staff with little "new blood" entering the system or the school. Teachers seemed content to remain in the grade they had taught for several years and in the school which they might have taught at for ten or more years. Some interviewees perceived, therefore, that the system needed a "blood

transfusion". A comment by a transferred principal supported this notion:

> I think the upper 'good reason' [for the transfers] was the fact that as principals, we had talked about there not being teachers moved in our system for quite some time. Teachers do get into ruts and, even within schools, teachers loathed to change grades.

This lack of mobility created problems for those teachers who desired movement within the system. A teacher who requested a transfer described the personal effects of this lack of movement:

> I was locked into the classroom I was in, in that school. The teachers were satisfied with the job they were doing; enjoyed teaching at the grade levels they taught in. There was no way to transfer grade levels or even change rooms I don't think... I felt I needed a change. I couldn't get a change within the school itself. So when these rumours came up, I simply applied for a transfer hoping that I would get transferred.

The lack of mobility, therefore, might have led to a lack of growth and a consequent sense of stagnation within the district. Several teachers cited this stagnation as the major reason for the transfers. One teacher placed this district within a national pattern:

> I know there has to be changes because there is a stagnation in all schools in most of the provinces. It is unfortunate because the whole body of education has to keep on living and growing. If you only have people who are tired out then you cannot allow a system of

education to die as a result -- kids happen to be our major resource.

A second teacher personalized 'being in a rut' and consequently provided a operationalization of this state:

> When you leave up displays each year. You don't take them down in June, like the solar system and it gets faded. I noticed that I wasn't taking it down in June. I used to strip the room completely in June, throw away things and start fresh. I then thought, no I'll leave it up. Then I got a little worried, am I in a rut? I think I was...

Several interviewees, not just the transferred teachers, used the phrase 'a change is as good as a rest' to relate the importance of movement within a system to the growth of the individuals within that system. The following quote exemplified this concept:

> I believe they [the transfers] occurred because people were staying in the same school year after year after year after year. The school tends to become stagnant. So sometimes a change is as good as a rest.

One transferred principal clearly supported the importance of growth as a major reason for the transfers:

> I think the seeds for the transfers came from the principals' committee. They felt perhaps if the people were in different locations and new situations that maybe it would help them grow rather than become stagnant... I think some of the difficulties came because not everyone shared those same ideas that it was growth.

A second transferred principal concurred with the above statement:

> [some transfers were voluntary] other transfers were mandates, I guess because principals and the Director saw people with good qualities, and lots of experience getting into ruts. [They were] becoming very complacent in the situation that they were in, having been there for ten, fifteen, sixteen years.

This importance of growth is further emphasized by the third transferred principal:

> I really think the primary motive has to be growth and, therefore, you are believing that the growth of the teacher means benefit to the child because the whole point is the child. It has to be for the benefit of the children. I do believe that is what we mean by growth.

Although the notion of growth to overcome the problems created by low mobility and stagnation were consistent throughout all interviews, other perceived reasons detracted from the perception of growth. These latter reasons were usually espoused by non-transferred teachers, trustees, parents, and principals. Generally, they focused on a disbelief of the publicly stated rationale of spreading the expertise throughout the Board, which was exemplified by a trustee's comment:

> There are good teachers in the school that have been here for many, many years. Why not take some of their goodness and professionalism and put it in another school? Let the parents of that area have a fresh outlook on a teacher and a fresh outlook on the school? You paint a school to make it look better. Let's put new faces in there and improve the centre of school as far as outlook on the education of the kids or even improve the image of the community.

Despite such public statements, many of those interviewed expressed the general feeling that some transfers were reprimands, and that other transfers were made to "cover up" the reprimand transfers. A trustee said, "I think the philosophy is transferring more than, say, a couple of teachers. I think that [doing so] might not have singled out any dead wood that was being transferred."

One non-transferred teacher quite blatantly stated, "If somebody is going to be transferred and told,'It is because we want to share your expertise ' nobody is going to believe it." This attitude can be directly related to the past history in the district when transfers were a reprimand. An administrator explained:

> Because in the past, and this would have been ten years down the road, anyone who was ever transferred it was done for disciplinary reasons. Those were the only ones that were ever transferred; the ones that couldn't do their jobs.

A second principal suggested the moves were prompted, at least in part, by problems:

> I think the other reason was that there were some problems developing and the Board and the Director found that might be a way to solve those problems. That may be a good reason too. I think there were problems of principals in communities or of teachers in schools, maybe with a certain principal or in a community for a long time.

Several parents echoed the view that individual teachers and principals were transferred because of problems concerning their work. Two comments suggested:

> But I really feel that there were enough complaints. Instead of getting rid of them which they probably couldn't do, they transferred them. I don't think they will probably be benefitting any students... I feel deep down that these people are not good teachers and they should not be teaching our children.

> The first answer that comes to mind is that they wanted to get rid of teachers. It worked... We had a principal here and I thought there was a lot of bad feelings about [the principal]. [The principal] had a lot of good points but a lot of people thought that [the principal] was a dead head.

Ironically, the teachers named by these parents as having been transferred for disciplinary reasons were named by parents in their new schools as being welcome additions to the teaching staff of those schools.

It was assumed that the multitude of the transfers were used as a cover-up to hide the reprimand transfers contrary to the assertions published in the local newspaper. As a non-transferred teacher explained:

> It could be that they didn't want all the people transferred but some were transferred to mask some that were needed to be transferred.

The different perspectives evidenced by the transferred teachers and the other groups interviewed might reflect a

rationalization on the part of the transferees or a misunderstanding by the other groups. However, this difference in perspectives remains crucial. If the transferred teachers were perceived by other teachers and community members as being transferred for discipline reasons, then the effects on the teachers could be negative. In this case transfers could be perceived as punishment rather than as professional growth opportunities. This could detract from the growth possibilities.

The comments of the teachers, principals, trustees, and parents on the reasons for the transfers were often characterized by uncertainty. Those interviewed frequently expressed their views as guesses or admitted to having no clear knowledge of why the transfers had occurred. One parent said:

> All of a sudden it was done. Nothing went out to parents or even casually written about in the paper. People just wondered why because it is such a drastic thing.

In some cases, the conjectures of those interviewed were quite imaginative, such as the belief that "someone in Toronto, high up, decided that this was a good idea" or the speculation that there was a "palace revolution" and that the transfers might have been made to avert a teacher "mutiny". A few felt that the transfers were made in response to community pressure for change,

and others felt that the transfer decision was quite capricious and arbitrary. The uncertainty extended to several trustees, who expressed a general lack of knowledge on the particulars of the transfer decision. One trustee commented:

> I think some of us -- I know I was -- were shocked when we found out the drastic changes that had taken place when we only thought there was going to be a principal switched. However, if that is the way the Director felt, I certainly went along with it.

The Director explained that the process originated with the Board and arose from the multiple motivations that have been described. A group of individuals to be transferred to alleviate perceived problems was identified, and other transfers were added later by the Director, who acknowledged that a "communications breakdown" had occurred in preparing for and announcing the transfers.

B. BEING TRANSFERRED

Throughout the interviews with the teachers, both transferred and non-transferred, the trauma created by 'being transferred' was strongly evident. Consistently, teachers talked about a school as being a 'home'; the transferred teachers talked about wanting to be 'transferred home again'. Transfers, in this sense, were envisioned almost as emigrating to a new country with all the cultural problems associated with such a move.

The personal impact on the transferred teachers was very noticeable when they were asked to describe how they were told about their transfer. Almost universally they described where they were when the Director came to talk to them, what they were doing at that precise moment, what the Director said to them, and what they replied. Such vivid detail is very reminiscent of the detail remembered by individuals concerning some major historical event, such as the end of a war, the assassination of Kennedy, or mans' first moon walk. This is understandable given that being informed of a transfer, especially if the current school was conceptualized as 'home', was a momentous event for the transferee.

Most teachers were offended by the impersonal manner in which the transfer decision was relayed to them. One teacher said:

> I think that the way the transfers took place, it emphasized a line between employer and employee. It wasn't so evident before to a lot of people. I think that a lot of people who did not regard it as such found that they were the property of the board of education.

A parent observed, "People were just told, 'This is where you are going, like it or not...' I really don't think it was quite fair to do it that way. These people are not cattle." The Director, for his part, explained the abruptness by describing

his understanding that the principals were supposed to have prepared the teachers for the announcement, which they did not do.

Individual reaction to the transfers ranged from anger, fear, or shock to anticipation, resignation, or pleasure. Some of these comments are included below to provide a flavour of the reactions:

anger:

> I was very angry for a long time because I felt that any wishes or desires that I had were simply not considered.

fear:

> My honest reactions were kind of a fear. It is like it was new. It was kind of exciting but there was a bit of fear because it would be all new children.

shock:

> It was a very big shock. Maybe it is like death. Even if you prepare yourself for someone's death, you are never ready for the moment.

anticipation:

> Well, I had the feeling... I kind of answered him [the Director] that I really should have come forward because I believed in the philosophy. I should have come forward and offered to be transferred, but I didn't.

resignation:

> I started to think about it and thought that maybe a change of school would be all right for a few years.

pleasure:

> I felt that I should move to another school and I was looking forward to having older children.

Even with the obviously strong reactions, only one teacher instituted some form of formal protest. The remainder of the transferred teachers cleaned up their old classrooms, discussed the move with the principal of the new school, or planned for their new assignment. Similarly, community members said that news of the transfers caused both shock and some pleasure or anger, followed by resignation and acceptance.

Generally it appeared that once the transfers were assigned, little formal support was provided for the teachers concerned. It seemed that only informal support was provided by the principal or other teachers in the school. Questions about support, in fact, were regarded with some puzzlement, indicating that the notion was not common. Teachers often expressed neither expecting nor desiring any help. A trustee who had formerly been a teacher said:

> I think we are babying teachers if they have to have any kind of support when they are moved anywhere. They are a teacher. They have taught before. They can manage. They are being well paid, in my book. The only support they need is from the principal.

The trustee went on, however, to modify these remarks by saying:

> You know if you are transferring deadwood, you want to have some kind of a follow-up to support that transfer. You can't transfer a person out of a school and just hope that principal and staff members will be able to rejuvenate or transform that individual into a better teacher. I think it is up to the supervisory officer as well as the principal of that school to make sure they [the transferee] pull up their socks.

C. THE EFFECTS OF THE TRANSFERS

Although just one teacher took overt action regarding the transfers, the evidence suggested that the impact of the transfer intervention was profound for the individuals concerned, the schools, and the district as a whole. The effects of the transfers constituted both advantages and disadvantages. In the following section, these effects will be investigated.

1. Physical Concerns

As previously discussed, the interviewed teachers frequently conceptualized their school as home. Therefore, it was not surprising that two of the major difficulties encountered by the transferred teachers and principals centered on the issue of new facilities and the factors concerned with commuting to their newly assigned schools. The concerns relating to the school's facilities were viewed both positively and negatively. For teachers transferred to Greenville, the facilities posed a major problem. These teachers cited a lack of resources and a physical

plant that lacked the amenities of their other schools as creating problems for their teaching. The teachers who were transferred from Greenville were quite pleased with their new facilities. They noted the importance of a gym, more variety and availability of resources as enhancing their teaching.

Several individuals suggested that this movement between Greenville and other schools ultimately will assist the Greenville school. For example, one teacher who was transferred from Greenville claimed:

> I have a mission in life now and, that is, if I could somehow get into a position in that school [Greenville] where I could start equipping it as well as this school is equipped and get things that I feel are lacking in that school [Greenville] into it... In my own little way, update the school.

This commitment to improving the Greenville school was evident with the interviews with the principal and a parent. The principal explained:

> We all are committed to try and improve [Greenville school] because every change we get, we try to in some way make sure these kids have what are in the other schools... There is a commitment here to bring the school up to par which would be good for the kids.

The parent echoed this sentiment and suggested that the transfers were a benefit to the community:

> With the new teachers coming in, I think it pointed out the deficiencies in our school here that maybe weren't

> seen by some of our teachers who stayed here for so long.

Perhaps the transfers have created a positive benefit for the Board in that there was some direct acknowledgement of the variations between the different schools. With increased knowledge regarding the resources available to improve the learning of children, these ideas might get transferred to other sites within the Board.

The second physical concern raised by the transferred teachers focused on the travel involved between the extremities of the Board. No transferred teacher perceived a positive side to this concern. Each teacher involved cited the conditions created by winter driving along a difficult and isolated stretch of highway as a major source of stress. One individual stated:

> I find that the day is long at this school. It takes 25-30 minutes in good weather. In winter weather, it can be longer and there are a few isolated stretches of the road where if you did go off, it might be awhile before anyone found you... There is just that added tension to the day. This year I think the Board has relieved it somewhat in that they have introduced a new snow policy...

Several individuals also noted the effects on the school created by the travel distances involved. A transferred teacher explained, "Distance is a major problem. You can't pop back to the school in the evenings or for half an hour." In this case, the teacher was referring to coming back in the evening to

complete some teaching related task, but a non-transferred teacher in the same school focused on another aspect of the problem:

> I know that when you drive, you don't want to stay here [after hours]. You want to get home to your own place. It is easier for me to get out for [school] functions.

The travel, then, might create problems with after-school interactions between teachers and students or between the community and the teachers. It was further noted by teachers who lived in the community, that if the weather was bad that the non-resident teachers were understandably late for school. This created some supervision problems for the resident teachers.

The time involved in traveling created other personal problems for some teachers. This related to the personal need to organize their own children or attend to personal business. As one teacher explained:

> We have a little difficulty with our children, getting them to school. Last year we had problems because the school bus would not pick up our daughter. So we have had a little bit of a problem getting to the school from the babysitters. So my wife would have to go home from her job and take her to school.

Another issue related to travel concerned the cost of commuting. Several individuals claimed that they had to purchase new cars in order to travel safely during the winter. One joked,

"I have often thought that some car dealership must be giving a kickback to the Board." In addition, the increased gas consumption and maintenance resulted in a loss of real income. This was resented by most of the teachers who had to drive daily the 25 or 30 miles each way.

2. Community Relations

Teachers and schools play an important role in smaller communities and, consequently, are more visible. In this regard, the effects of the transfers appeared two-fold: on one level there seemed to be a renewed interest in the schools while on a second level, there appeared to be a concern with the decrease of resident teachers. When the transfer policy was implemented it appeared to foster increased public interest in the schools:

> I think [transferred teacher] that there was an advantage in that there was a lot more interest shown in Board activities, if that is an advantage. I think it is a good advantage. I think people opened their ears and thought, 'We had better keep track of what is going on'. A lot of people stopped me on the street, who had never talked to me before, to ask me my feelings on it [the transfers]. I think that is a good thing.

A non-transferred teacher had also noticed this renewed interest in the school and the teachers:

> I think because of the new faces, the community did show a little more interest. They were kind of relaxed

> with the way it was before. They became more interested.

This increased interest in the schools could be interpreted as a benefit derived from the transfer policy.

One possible problem created by the transfer of teachers between communities was the decrease in the number of resident teachers. According to data collected, no transferred teacher moved to the community where their new school was located. As previously mentioned, this created one problem in that these teachers were not able to easily attend community functions. This suggested that the parents might not be as personally acquainted with the non-resident teachers as they were previously when most teachers lived within the community. One parent noted this problem, "They are not in the community where they live. I think that is a big void. The teachers aren't as involved." A principal expressed her own problems in trying to function in two communities:

> I don't feel that I am really part of [my home town] crowd that I used to be active with. Yet I am not really a part of these people [in the school community] because I go home at night. I am like a gypsy.

In addition, certain problems might result from the decrease in personal relationships between the community and the teaching staff. Teachers and principals alike recognized the importance of

building trust, of counteracting the feeling that "you are coming in from the outside... You don't belong here. You are not family."

Another concern alluded to by parents and teachers was the lack of continuity created by the transfers. Parents, in particular, expressed a preference for tradition, often wanting all of their children to be taught by the same teacher and feeling more comfortable dealing with teachers who have a known history in the community. A trustee explained:

> I think I have come up with the idea that when we have had a teacher in a school for a while that teacher gets to know families. They know the hardships. They know the little things that perhaps are terrific in the family and perhaps not so good in the family. I think they are better equipped to really meet the student's needs.

The new teachers did not know the community or the past histories of the families. A transferred teacher described both the problem created, and his solution:

> Another problem I found was having been at one school for 8 years, I had almost been through a generation. I had gone through whole families in some cases. Then stepping into this school. My only hope of establishing some kind of contact with the kids was from my grade level and below because the other kids will be gone.
>
> I do try to talk to the younger children. Coming up to the staff room at lunch, I stop and talk to them. If there is a special event that I can leave my room for a second, I will help them with their costumes or work on the bulletin board. I feel a lot more comfortable with the grade 8 class this year than I did last year. I found this year, when I was on lunch duty with the

> senior students, that we put up the volleyball net and we started playing volleyball. It is a lot easier to get to know them while you are doing something.

Seemingly, this situation would be created whenever any new teacher joins a staff and could be met by consultation with existing staff. For principals as well, the lack of continuity was disconcerting. One said:

> I found it really difficult to see all unfamiliar faces and unfamiliar names... [When you are in a school for a long time] you know a child for eight years and when they are in grade eight they are not a surprise to you.

3. Broadened Perspective

Almost as a contrast to the perceived problem created by a decrease of resident teachers, various interview comments emphasized the increased system perspective as a direct benefit derived from the transfers. In a system covering a large geographical area, such as the Newcastle-Kent Board of Education, it is difficult to project a sense of system. This problem was heightened by past history when each community maintained its own separate school board. By transferring teachers to different communities within the system, the system enabled teachers to receive and provide a system-wide view. A transferred teacher noted this perspective:

> By going to Kent, Greenville, and Newcastle, teachers are going to talk about curriculum and the things they

did at other schools. I think it does pull the schools together.

A principal also suggested that a system-wide perspective was a benefit of the transfers:

> I think that the advantage would be that more people know more about the whole system than they did before. They were more concerned with their own school system. but now more people know more about the whole system. I think that is an advantage because you have knowledgeable people and if there are any system decisions to be made, and if there is input, then they can make a better decision.

The interviewed trustees, in particular, noted the increased system perspective. In general, they emphasized the importance of viewing the Board as a whole system as opposed to a situation when three separate communities compete for resources. Ironically, by transferring teachers from Kent and Newcastle to Greenville there appears to be an attempt to bring the Greenville school up to par with the other district schools. This lobbying, however, reflects a growing sense of knowledge regarding the Board as a system. One comment summarized the trustee perspective:

> I think it is good for the community. We have three separate distinct communities. Sitting on the Board, we often hear, 'Why is Newcastle or Kent getting something and we aren't?' Whereas this way, I think they feel the School Board is the same for all three districts. I think it is good and good for the teachers.

In addition to a broader perspective of the school system, the transfers also seemed to promote a broader perspective on educating children for many teachers. Several teachers who made significant grade-level changes expressed a new realization of how the development of children proceeded. They expressed satisfaction in seeing earlier or later stages than they had formerly experienced closely, and developed a deeper sense of the continuum of development. For several, working with younger or older children was an eye-opener, an occasion for revealing some taken-for-granted assumptions:

> In gym, doing skipping, there were some children in the class who didn't know how to hold a rope, which completely blows your lesson. You think they all know how to hold it but you have to go over and show them.

Similarly, some teachers broadened their perspectives by working with children of different abilities and from different socioeconomic groups:

> I have 2 boys in grade 4 who right now are working in the grade 5 math program and the 3 of us have decided that they are going to try the National Mathematics Test... That is really exciting for me. I have never had anything like that before.

4. School Climate

School climate refers to the social, emotional, physical, and intellectual climate of a school. Recent evidence, derived

from the effective schools literature, suggests that school climate does have a direct influence on the learning occuring in classrooms. Seemingly, the climate of the school is closely linked with the existing conditions for professional growth of teachers. The evidence from this study supports this contention. It appeared that the transfers not only fostered professional growth for the concerned teachers, but also encouraged their non-transferred colleagues to question their teaching practices through the introduction of different and new ideas into the school environment. In turn, this was translated into an improved learning climate for students.

Perhaps the major impact on the schools has been a sense of renewal; the creation of a new set of interaction patterns resulting from a 'new staff'. As one principal explained, "I think it is a little like a blood transfusion. The children have to get to know someone new and in a new position. That doesn't hurt at all." A transferred teacher supported this contention:

> I don't feel that it has done any harm at all. I think it has done it a lot of good because the same teachers had been in [the school] for years and years. I think you need a change.

Through the process of transfer, then, staff compositions were shuffled which resulted in a realignment of existing groupings within the school. As one teacher reported:

> I think being in the same school, doing the same thing, being with the same people got to be either a clique or out of the clique kind of thing. You belonged to the fire department or not...

The creation of the 'new staff' not only dispersed existing cliques or groupings within the schools but forced 'old' and 'new' staff alike to question and defend their philosophies. A non-transferred teacher explained:

> We have always been a supportive school, our whole school. The people that came in, because they wanted to transfer, took a little time to become part of that network. There was a lot of frustration and confusion because the people that came in, did not have the same philosophies that we had.

A teacher transferred to that school describes the frustration and the eventual adjustment:

> Sometimes they would do something that really irked me because that is not the way they would have done it at my school... There were times when I had to admit that I was wrong. But there were times when I felt they had to admit they were wrong too. So there was a bit of friction with the staff... but nothing we couldn't overcome.

The differences in teaching philosophies might have created a situation where individual teachers and staff in general had to reflect on their past practices. A non-transferred teacher suggested, "We still have to fight for our philosophies. It forces you to stand up for what you believe in." The cognitive dissonance created by 'standing up for what you believe in', might also force a reflection and modification of those beliefs.

Even if the philosophy remained the same after reflection, it has been re-examined. The process, in itself, resulted in professional growth for those involved. This reflection process, created by the influx of transferred teachers, can be classified as beneficial for the schools involved.

In addition to the philosophical reflection, a more practical aspect of the transfers has been the introduction of new teaching strategies into the various schools. A second non-transferred teacher described the influence on her teaching practice:

> A different way of setting up a reading program... I tried various ways but without someone right here to talk to, some of them didn't work. Now that I have a little on-going help [from the transferred teachers], they work. Some new music ideas as well. All kinds of things... This is the only school that I have ever taught in. So new ideas were brought to me.

This infusion of new strategies was evident also for the transferred individuals. One transferred teacher explained:

> It is just to get new people into a new school for a new grade and working with new people. You get new ideas. You get new people working on different committees and taking an interest in different things.

In summary, the transfers fostered a sense of renewal in the schools. Individuals questioned existing practices and introduced new ideas into the school. Through this process, the existing attitudes and beliefs were affected. As one trustee noted:

> I think it has been successful. The schools have all made changes. The attitudes have all changed in all the schools. I think it has been for the better.

5. Teacher Morale

A negative effect of the transfers on school climate was also noted in the comments. Several claimed that the uncertainties surrounding future assignments had a serious impact on teacher morale. Teachers who maintained a hostile attitude towards the transfer policy evidenced a morale problem that might be translated into attitudes towards their work. For instance, one such individual claimed, "I had a vocation; now, I have a job." Referring to a small number of hostile teachers, a principal noted, "I think they just decided to put the brakes on, 'Oh well, I'll do my time'." One teacher advocated that this attitude prevailed in the schools:

> [Teachers are] more regimented when throwing themselves into extra work. I think that people would, possibly, not expose themselves to criticisms by expressing opinions.

Yet one transferred teacher claimed:

> The teachers I work on committees with, they are not putting any more effort into it than they did when they worked on the committees before. I don't find anything different.

Although this teacher maintained that there was little difference in teacher morale or work habits, numerous interview

comments suggested there was a pervasive fear of transfer. A principal explained the relationship:

> I think they are saying morale but what they are really meaning is that they didn't have a choice and that makes them afraid. Every year we have a deadline for transfers. They watch those dates like hawks. They watch them; some because they requested transfers back to where they came from, some because they haven't moved yet and they don't know what is going to happen to them.

Transfers were perceived by some individuals to be a threat; a threat that induced fear. Two comments emphasized the importance of this emotional response:

> Of course, most people would say if you don't behave yourself, you know where you will be going. You will be sent to ..... Therefore, I guess we felt like it would be punishment.

> You almost felt that if you have been in a school for say ten years then you had better watch out because you might be transferred whether you are doing a good job or not. That is almost the feeling that I have now. It creates a great deal of insecurity, stress, and worry.

Even with this strong reaction, one transferred teacher advises colleagues on the benefits of transfers:

> I know there are teachers in this school that are deathly afraid that it [transfer] will happen to them. When they get on the subject, they really start shaking and turn pale... I don't think it would hurt them. They would find out that it is not a death sentence. It is a difference. But I think, except in extreme situations, they would find it mostly a positive thing if they were transferred. It is not a scary thing.

Morale problems also occurred among the transferred teachers. Often, individuals came to grips with the reality of their transfer very quickly and resolved to work through the situation. A few toyed briefly with leaving teaching; some experienced psychological withdrawal. For a few teachers morale problems persisted well into the first year, although they testified that adjustment came with time. One teacher said, "I have mellowed in the sense that I can smile about it. I can joke about it. I possibly can see the validity in transfers." Another said, "This year is much easier. But last year if you were to interview me then, I would not have had much to say." Most teachers described a smoother and more satisfying experience during the second year after transfer, suggesting that the positive impacts of transfer grow more apparent with time. A principal remarked, "Once you sort of got over it and everything just sort of died down again and the dust settled, then you could breathe deeply and go on with what you were doing."

6. Professional Development

Teacher professional development was the major espoused reason for the implementation of the transfer policy. The interview data overwhelmingly support the notion that the transfers resulted in professional development for the

individuals involved. Moreover, as previously discussed, non-transferred teachers also evidenced some degree of professional growth. Only one interviewed individual claimed that no personal professional development resulted from the transfer. Otherwise, as the following evidence documents, the transfer policy appeared to meet the intended goal of professional growth.

Earlier sections of this paper noted several areas of teacher professional growth. These included: an increased sense of the system, a more in-depth understanding of the developmental patterns of children, a questioning of personal educational philosophy, and a change of teaching strategies.

During the interviews some of the teachers expressed their awareness of the need for new stimulus. One said:

> I felt that I was very good at it [coming up with new ideas] when I was first out of teachers' college. Things came easy. You had a great idea for at least one period every day... At least once a day, I would have a real grabber lesson. Then as I stayed there, it would get to be about once every two days. Then maybe once a week I would get excited about something.

Through the transfers, teachers were forced to teach new subjects and new grade levels; work with new colleagues; communicate with a new set of parents; and teach children of different ages and socioeconomic status. Perhaps this sense

of 'newness' was the underlying foundation of the experienced professional development. By encountering new situations and individuals, teachers were forced to re-organize, develop new lessons and modify teaching methods. One transferred teacher shared his experience:

> I really feel that I have gotten out of a rut. I find that my ideas are becoming more creative rather than simple book-type instruction. I'm doing all kinds of things in the classroom that I probably wouldn't have thought of doing if I had been at [the old school]. I would have been trying the old tried and true things whether they worked or not. I think that [the transfer] has kind of revitalized me. I find we [the class] are doing things this year that I had never dreamed of doing.

A second teacher noted that the transfer resulted in professional growth:

> I think I have escaped the turtle syndrome. I learned it is not the school but what you do in it... If I hadn't been transferred I would have moved in a very short time because I felt I had been too long in one school.

Many of the teachers interviewed evidenced a sense of excitment concerning the learning exeriences encountered through the transfer process. In one particular case, a transferred teacher almost became poetical when describing what he had learned about the teaching/learning process through his new assignment with younger children:

> As a teacher, I think I have grown tremendously. It has always intrigued me as a teacher. You have a child

> who cannot read. How do you teach him to read? I found it hard. Just watching the children learn. Someone that cannot read and suddenly something dawns or clicks and they see the symbol. Then they start putting sounds together. I've learned the importance of things like the shape of my lips and where my tongue is in relation to my teeth when I speak. Things like that that are involved in teaching sound and in reading. Things that I had never thought of before and I am starting to find out. That means a lot. It sounds like something small but it is unbelievable. I don't look down on primary teachers. It is not just cutting and pasting. It is work.

Professional growth resulted also for the transferred principals. Each of the transferred principals attributed their personal professional development to being transferred. One principal said, "I told the Board last June that... I just love what you have done to me. I think it is almost a complete changeover." She went on to explain:

> At [the old] school, I rather emulated my former principal with whom I had worked for all those years. I found that I just followed along on what he had done. This gave me a chance to think about how I could improve as a principal because I do think I have flaws as an administrator. That one year allowed me a bit of a chance. After I got a few months of being in it, I started to really work at the job of being a principal.

In addition to the personal dimension, each transferred principal described the evident growth of the transferred teachers within their schools. As one principal explained, growth could be related to increased knowledge of self:

> I know that they [teachers] have learned, even about themselves if they would take the time to examine it. Just about their own psychology.

A second principal described the professional development occurring in more concrete terms:

> There are people on my staff that I have worked with during the past twenty years in another situation, at another time and I see over the last year a growth. They are more willing to adapt. They are trying new things. Almost like a renewed interest in their lessons. Of course, the people who were transferred here, all have different grade levels. So they all had to start learning again. Some of them had been in the same grade level for say 15 years and had never moved. So, of course, in order to cope with a new situation, you have to learn new things. You can't just fake it. So I have seen professional growth.

The third transferred principal spoke of the growth experience of an individual teacher. In this instance, the principal suggested that the renewal that occurred through the transfers resulted in more active involvement within the school:

> He [the teacher] has taken on more responsibility. He is better organized. He is better planned. He is more involved, I think, in the school and with the children than he was before [the transfer].

In summary, the evidence suggests that professional growth did result for most individuals transferred. Through the very act of preparing for a new school and new children, the teacher had to accept the challenge of designing a new program. Such a task required reflection, and growth was fostered through

reflection. Rather than just performing the teacher role, the teachers became learners involved in discovering new knowledge and revising previous knowledge regarding the teaching/learning process. Learning through discovery is exciting and invigorating; and, in this instance, was translated into professional growth.

IV. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In this final section, the topic turns to the issue of a transfer policy. The forthcoming suggestions are based upon the direct interview comments referring to such a policy and an interpretation of the evidence. The preceding sections of this report described the success of the transfer policy in relation to professional growth. Involuntary teacher transfer, in theory, can provide one intervention solution to the problem of teacher stagnation resulting from the current low-mobility existing within the educational community.

Certainly, the data suggested that there was a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding involved in the implementation of the transfer policy. Such a state detracted from the evident professional growth benefits. A revised policy based on an increased understanding of the process would aid administrators and teachers in implementing future transfers; consequently, the

goal of professional development would be achieved. Several suggestions emerged in the interviews that might assist in this endeavor. These concerns have been grouped under the following sub-sections: long-term planning, communications, consultation, and the professional preparation of teachers. These issues are addressed in this final section.

1. Long-term Planning

As described in an earlier section of this report, the transferred teachers had different perceptions of the reasons underlying the transfers than did other interviewed individuals. In addition, throughout the interviews there appeared to be a great deal of confusion as to the 'real' reason for the transfer policy. This confusion was emphasized in the following principal's comment:

> Some of them found false reasons. Maybe some of [the reasons] had a grain of truth but really in spite of what was put in the newspaper, they felt it was all a white wash job.

Possibly, the past history of reprimand transfers led to this confusion, but whatever the causal factor, such a confused situation did detract from the teachers' esteem. Seemingly, if transfers were to be included in a long-range plan which was a taken-for-granted component of working in this district, then the

negative self-esteem aspects would decline. If this scenario were adopted then the aura of reprimand would cease to surround transferred individuals. This would remove one of the major problems associated with being transferred.

Generally, the interviewed individuals agreed with the notion of transfer. They suggested that transfers be considered a common occurrence in one's career and recommended that a transfer could be anticipated after a given time period in a school. Five years at one site was a suggestion made by a large majority of the interviewed individuals. A teacher's comment supports this notion, "I would say every five or six years. My policy would be very simple: change, yes, change."

When possible, voluntary transfer should be encouraged. The research included in the literature review and the data from this study suggests that the professional growth might be greater for individuals who desire a transfer. One trustee addressed this concern:

> I look at the teacher improving himself by the transfer... but then if they are not willing and they are fighting it the whole year, I doubt if they have learned much.

The problem with advocating a voluntary transfer policy is that typically teachers do not want to transfer. Certainly, the Board had encouraged transfers for three years before

implementing involuntary transfers and did not receive a great number of applications. Many teachers recalled that they had been asked to make voluntary changes and had refused. Some felt somewhat guilty or sheepish about their reluctance while others, such as the teacher who said, "Let someone else offer " resisted openly. One teacher said, "Teachers should have realized it was coming and if they wanted to talk, should have talked ahead of time. I put a little bit more onus on the teachers than on the Board here." A principal describes the problem as fear of change, "They [the teachers] don't think of boredom. They just think of their comfort and their fears. There really are fears." As one trustee suggested, "I firmly believe if you left it to be voluntary, you wouldn't have any teachers moving."

Although voluntary transfers are preferable to non-voluntary transfers, the evidence from this study suggests that, with the exception of some extreme cases, the vast majority of the involuntary transfers did result in professional growth. A transfer policy could encourage voluntary transfer while concurrently establishing involuntary transfer as an alternative when teachers fail to take the initiative.

Another suggestion advanced by several interviewed individuals was the necessity of advance warning. Perhaps if a

long-range plan was established, teachers would be advised of a possible transfer a year in advance. This would be especially beneficial if the move entailed further professional training necessary for the new assignment or could permit personal financial planning.

One principal suggested that principals meet with their staffs at periodic intervals to discuss what staffing changes might be made for both school improvement and personal growth. Similar long-range planning meetings could be held at the district level involving principals, trustees, the Director, and teacher and parent representatives. A parent emphasized planning, "I don't think you should have transfers for the sake of transfers. I think you should have logical transfers when there is a reason for them."

In summary, a long-range plan that incorporated transfers as one aspect of professional development would assist in fostering teacher growth in a non-threatening manner. If transfers were to become taken-for-granted and anticipated, then the fear associated with being transferred should decrease. Transfers might come to be viewed as opportunities rather than as punishment. This approach could decrease the major negative aspect of the transfer policy.

2. Communications

When implementing the transfer policy, the Director personally informed the teachers in school visits. However, as described earlier, teachers found these visits abrupt, and there did appear to be a lack of communication regarding the reasons for the transfers among the teachers and community at large. Implementation of a transfer policy should contain clearly defined methods of communications. For instance, all teachers should be informed as to the reasons for the transfers. If transfers become routine in the Board then the rationale provided would relate to the time period established for remaining in one school. However, if the transfer is related to a specific problem then the problem should be clearly outlined and shared with the concerned individual. When the individual is transferred for this reason, a support plan should be established to assist the transferee in addressing the problem. Throughout the process, communications between the teaching staff and the central administration should be of paramount importance. One teacher provided some advice on the communication issue:

> If there is a misunderstanding, then long before it should occur, there should be talk, meetings, discussions... We knew the transfers were coming. It wasn't hidden. It was as clear as anything. That is when the talking should have occurred.

3. Consultation

The need for consultation is allied to the issue of communications. Through consultation with the involved individual, that individual can feel part of the process rather than an object to be manipulated. A comment by one of the transferred teachers emphasizes this point:

> Maybe ask people a little more. Where would you like to go? Is there a certain grade level? It is just like a dictatorship. It was all so cut and dried. You felt like you were some kind of number and you were told where to go and that was all there was to it. I guess that is the part I resented; it wasn't the actual change.

Several other teachers echoed the teacher's feeling that they resented the manner in which changes were made rather than the changes themselves.

Through a consultative process, the teachers might gain more ownership in the process. A principal provided the following advice regarding the issue of consultation:

> Being a diplomat, I think that they should be [consulted]. Because when they are happy and they feel it is part of their decision, then I think they are more willing to do it.

One trustee emphasized that the personal, as well as professional, needs of a teacher be considered in transfer

decisions. She said, "I don't think we are beyond looking at that human side."

The suggestion advanced here is not that teachers necessarily have a choice on whether they are transferred but can have some input on where they are transferred and what grade level they will be assigned. An honest effort to communicate and consult with the individuals involved might further decrease the negative attitudes and the fears associated with transfer. Similarly, consultation between the Director and trustees and principals prior to the announcement of any transfers would enable them to have the ownership and knowledge of the decision that they need to explain or defend it.

4. Professional Preparation of Teachers

Teacher education has encouraged teachers to become specialists at certain grade levels. Seemingly, this preparation must be taken into account when orchestrating transfers in the district. While, in some cases, individuals might desire to, or be prepared to assume teaching duties at different levels, most teachers are only prepared to teach at certain levels. The training and experience of the teacher should be considered when making transfer decisions. Although it is advantageous to have

teachers change grade levels, perhaps that change could be slight. For instance, a change from grade four to six might accomplish the professional growth goal just as easily as a change between grade two and four. Certainly, this issue should be discussed with the potential transferee. Opportunities for advance preparation must be extended when dramatic grade level changes are being considered.

CONCLUSION

In this report, several issues regarding transfers have been addressed. The data suggests that the transfers resulted in professional growth for those individuals transferred. As an initial intervention attempt to enhance professional growth during a period of low mobility, the transfers can be classified as successful. However, further refinement of the process and policy might lead to more dramatic change.

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